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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1521
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5008
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8603
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6172
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000734

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: ON ANNIVERSARY OF MONK-LED PROTESTS, RUMORS ABOUND
AMID HEIGHTENED SECURITY

Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) GOB authorities visibly increased security in Rangoon in the lead-up to the September 18 anniversary of the start of last year's monk-led protests in Rangoon. Rumors of impending protests continue, and one Buddhist monk unsuccessfully attempted suicide at the Shwedagon Pagoda, perhaps intending to make a political statement. Nonetheless, we have not yet observed any demonstrations in Rangoon. Many of our contacts noted that they did not consider September 18 to be a particularly significant date; most viewed the anniversary of the Pakkoku incident on September 4 and the anniversary of the crackdown on September 25-27 to be more noteworthy dates. An NLD Uncle advised us to "watch out next week." Another source told us monks are planning to lay flowers at key locations in Rangoon September 125. The 88 Generation Students are distributing a commemorative video throughout the country. End Summary.

HEIGHTENED SECURITY

12. (C) Embassy staff and sources observed heightened security in several downtown Rangoon neighborhoods this week. Authorities ordered the nighttime closure of at least two major roads and posted security forces at key points, including Shwedagon Pagoda. According to eye witnesses, on September 16, riot police staged a protest-response drill near a police barracks in downtown Rangoon, which may have sparked the false rumor that a protest had taken place in the area. State media have been silent about the upcoming anniversary.

13. (C) On the evening of September 17, four Embassy officers independently observed roadblocks in several different areas of Rangoon. In each case we observed uniformed police and officials in plain clothes stopping all cars (except for diplomatic vehicles) and inspecting the vehicles and their occupants. One Embassy contact reported that her vehicle had been thoroughly searched at a checkpoint staffed by over 40 plainclothes personnel. Another contact noted that checkpoint procedures were more complicated than in the past; now officials were recording not only vehicle

details but also personal information on passengers. RSO sources told us the checkpoints are being staffed by a combination of Swan Arr Shin (pro-regime thugs), USDA members, Ward Council members, military intelligence and Special Branch personnel.

MONK ATTEMPTS SUICIDE

¶4. (C) An Embassy source has confirmed a media report that a Buddhist monk slashed his throat at the Shwedagon Pagoda in an apparent suicide attempt. Although a trustee of the temple said the monk (who survived the attempt) attempted suicide due to a lack of money to pay for medical care, our contact questioned why he would do so at a high-profile location like the Shwedagon if there was no political motive. She added that the suicide attempt took place in the "victory corner" of the Shwedagon, an area typically used for sending a political message.

RUMORS ABOUND

¶5. (C) Rumors of impending demonstrations persist. Following the Charge's September 16 meeting at National League for Democracy (NLD) headquarters, Uncle Nyunt Wai pulled the Charge aside and gave a heads-up: "Watch out next week!" Asked if he could say more, Nyunt Wai said "No." NLD spokesman Nyan Win told us he could not confirm that anything is being planned, but said he continues to hear rumors of

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demonstrations. A local media contact relayed an unconfirmed rumor that an unknown number of monks have demanded the regime release all detained monks by September 26, 2008, but did not know if they have also threatened protests if their demands are not met.

¶6. (C) On September 11, senior monk and prominent Buddhist figure Ashin Nyanissara told us he did not know of any protests or other commemorations being planned to mark the anniversary. However, on September 18, 88 Generation Student (88GS) leader Toe Kyaw Hlaing told us monks are planning to lay flowers at significant locations in Rangoon (including the Shwedagon Pagoda) on September 25 to commemorate the anniversary of the crackdown. He said he expects the authorities will attempt to stop the monks from doing so.

KEY DATES/COMMEMORATIVE VCD

¶7. (C) Many of our contacts, including Toe Kyaw Hlaing, noted that they did not consider September 18 to be a particularly significant date. Instead, most viewed the anniversary of last year's Pakkoku incident on September 4 (in which police in the town of Pakkoku beat several monks as they marched peacefully through town) and the anniversary of the crackdown on September 25-27, 2007 to be much more noteworthy dates.

¶8. (C) The NLD plans to hold an event on September 27 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the party's founding. Toe Kyaw Hlaing told us that NLD chair Aung Shwe had been initially reluctant to hold the event due to coinciding with the anniversary of last year's events, but other NLD members convinced him to change his mind.

¶9. (C) Toe Kyaw Hlaing passed us copies of a commemorative Video Compact Disk (similar to a DVD) that the 88GS group is distributing throughout the country. The forty-minute video, narrated in Burmese, is a high-quality video chronology of the events of last September, including the marches, beatings, and monastery raids.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) The regime appears to be taking significant precautions to avoid a repeat of last September. Security is noticeably tighter than it was in August prior to the 20th anniversary of the 8/8/88 democracy protests - designed, we expect, to have both a practical and psychological effect - and the regime has continued a steady stream of arrests around the country. Given the limited information available, it is tough, as always, to predict what might occur. There are Burmese willing to attempt to commemorate the events of last September in some way, so the possibility for anti-regime activity exists.
DINGER